

# ARIZONA Planning Bulletin



Arizona Strip Resource Management Plan Revision  
Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument Management Plan  
Vermilion Cliffs National Monument Management Plan

## Bureau of Land Management & National Park Service Arizona Strip

April 2003, Vol. 3

### Planners begin drafting alternatives

The Arizona Strip Planning team has begun developing management alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement covering management plans for three areas – the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument, the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument, and the “public domain” BLM land between the monuments on the Arizona Strip.

The major issues and concerns for these areas identified during the public scoping phase of the planning process are access, wilderness, resource protection, livestock grazing, and recreation. The Planning Team has been looking at how to address these key decision points:

- To what extent can we provide recreational, managerial, and commercial access while protecting resource values, sensitive species, and special areas?
- To what extent should additional lands be managed for wilderness values, such as naturalness, solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation?
- To what extent will we restore ecological systems that are outside their natural range of variability?
- How do we protect monument objects?

Some of the tools and methods the planning team may use to address these decision points are a route evaluation tree for transportation and access, ecoregions for natural resources, and a wilderness evaluation process.

### Route Evaluation Tree - How will transportation and access be managed?

A “Route Evaluation Tree” is being developed for all BLM planning efforts in Arizona. This process considers a number of criteria, including commercial, private, and administrative access; benefits or impacts to various resources; recreation opportunities and needs; and route redundancy. Each planning office can address specific questions tied to local planning issues from a long list of specific criteria such as:

- Is there potential for the route to require minor modification, reconstruction, or even major capacity improvements?
- Does the responsible agency have plans for the route?
- Does the route negatively impact any endangered species, archeological site or geologic feature. If so, can the impact be mitigated through maintenance or gating?
- Does the route provide access to and/or pass through, cross over, intersect, or otherwise affect any legally or administratively designated or proposed sites or areas?
- Should the route be limited to commercial, private, or administrative access only?
- Is the route an important link between recognized recreation use areas or motorized/nonmotorized trails?

Use of a systematic, route-by-route evaluation tree will provide a consistent way to identify a transportation network that addresses many diverse needs. Public comments and suggestions about what kinds of specific criteria should be considered in the route evaluation process are welcome.

## **Ecoregions – How will natural resources be protected?**

The Arizona Strip contains a rich diversity of features and ecological communities. Its elevation ranges from 1,250 feet in the Mojave Desert to 8,000 feet in the ponderosa pine forests.

This diversity adds complexity to the planning process – a one-size-fits-all approach may not be appropriate for all planning decisions. To address this, planners are incorporating an “ecoregion” approach as a guide for understanding issues and developing solutions appropriate for the soils, vegetation and wildlife found in each ecoregion.

Planners have designated and described seven “ecoregions” based on the climate, geology, soils, plants and animals of the area. A description of the ecoregions follows, and an ecoregion map is included.

**Great Basin** – Found throughout the mid-elevations on the Strip, this ecoregion is dominated by pinyon-juniper forests and sagebrush and blackbrush shrublands.

**Mojave-Great Basin Transition** – Found along the transition between the Mojave and Great Basin ecoregions, it contains elements of both. Soil and vegetation vary widely in this area, but most of the same issues that apply to the Mojave apply here as well.

**Plains Grassland** – Another widespread ecoregion on the Strip, it includes a variety of grasses and forbs.

**Mojave Desert** – Characterized by low shrubs, with creosote being the most common. Other dominant plants found in the Mojave include Joshua trees, Mojave yucca, catclaw, blackbrush and saltbrush.

**Interior Chaparral** – Found on the Strip only in the Virgin Mountains. It’s characterized by dense stands of evergreen shrubs such as shrub live oak, mountain mahogany and manzanita.

**Ponderosa Pine Forest** – Found in small, isolated pockets on the Arizona Strip.

**Riparian** – Found along seeps, springs, and streams. It includes three major communities: cottonwood-willow, salt cedar, and water dependent grasses.



## **Ecoregions – An example**

While some of the Arizona Strip planning challenges cover the entire Strip, others differ based on ecoregion. Fire management is one challenge that will vary among ecoregions. Native desert shrubs in the Mojave Desert ecoregion, for instance, are neither fire-tolerant nor fire-dependent. Wildfires were rare in the Mojave Desert until the 1930s, when exotic annual grasses became established. These grasses now provide fuel for wildfires that can devastate native vegetation and reduce wildlife habitat and rangeland. In order to protect resources, planners may look to aggressively fight fires in this ecoregion.

On the other hand, fire is part of the natural cycle in the Great Basin ecoregion. Fire may help control the spread of pinyon and juniper onto the grasslands, and fire could be an important management tool for restoring some of the Great Basin’s ecological communities. But the fire management appropriate for a remote section of the Great Basin ecoregion may not be appropriate near human developments.

## **Wilderness – Are more areas needed to protect monument and wilderness values?**

The process being used to address wilderness varies slightly between NPS lands and BLM lands in this planning area.

The 1979 Lake Mead National Recreation Area Wilderness Proposal will be brought forward for NPS lands within the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument. Because the majority of NPS lands within this monument are currently classified as proposed wilderness, they are required under NPS policies to be managed as wilderness until legislative wilderness designation has been completed. During this planning process, minor changes to the proposal may be made, if necessary, to address resource protection concerns.

BLM policy requires any lands acquired since the previous wilderness inventory to be inventoried for wilderness character. The original wilderness inventory of BLM land in Arizona was completed in November 1980. In 1984, Congress passed the Arizona Wilderness Act and designated eight wilderness areas on the Arizona Strip.

BLM and NPS will also address a wilderness proposal submitted by a coalition of environmental organizations recommending additional wilderness areas over a large portion of the Grand Canyon-Parashant and Vermilion Cliffs national monuments, as well as five additional wilderness areas on the Arizona Strip outside the monuments. Planners will evaluate each of these recommendations area by area to determine if they possess “wilderness character.” If so, additional analysis will evaluate the area’s manageability and suitability as a wilderness study area (BLM) or proposed wilderness (NPS).

Allocations of potential Wilderness Study Areas for BLM and proposed wilderness for NPS will be the end product of this planning effort. Wilderness designation is determined by Congress.



## **Areas Needing Management Attention – Which areas should be protected or restored?**

The term “Areas Needing Management Attention” (ANMA) refers to specific areas that have been shown through inventory to need management action to protect and/or rehabilitate the site and associated resources, or to improve public safety.

This management action could take the form of a project, greater law enforcement attention, or special designation, such as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Resource Conservation Area, etc.

Designations can range from official designation to simple recognition that an area is somehow special. What sets these areas apart from the other areas on the Strip is that there may be one or more special values that should be identified.

ANMAs could include:

- **Special Areas** – important locations of rare, sensitive, and/or valuable resources, or with special administrative or Congressional designations.
- **Degraded Areas** – locations outside the ecological range of natural variability or desired social condition, or areas that do not meet the desired ecological conditions established for each ecoregion, due to current or past management activities.
- **Public Safety Areas** – locations of areas with specific public safety concerns, such as abandoned mines with inherently dangerous conditions, hazardous waste sites, popular cliff climbing and rappelling sites.

## Public meetings coming in June

Public meetings on draft management alternatives will be held in June. More details about the alternatives and meetings will follow in an upcoming Planning Bulletin. All meetings will be 4-6 p.m., local time:

June 2 – Mesquite  
June 3 – St. George  
June 4 – Fredonia  
June 5 – Kingman  
June 6 – Flagstaff

## Contact Information

Comments about the Arizona Strip planning effort are welcome anytime. Send them to:

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## Planning Progress

Scoping	May, June 2002
Identifying issues	July-Sept 2002
<b>Develop alternatives</b>	<b>Spring 2003</b>
Public meetings	June 2-6, 2003
Draft Management Plan/EIS	May 2004
Public Meetings	June 2004
Proposed Management Plan/Final EIS	Oct. 2005

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